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PROGRAM The MacNeil/Lehrer Report

STATION WETA TV  
PBS Network

DATE January 5, 1982 7:30 PM

CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT The Soviets and the U.S. High Technology

ROBERT MACNEIL: Years ago, Lenin put it this way: "The capitalistic economy plants the seeds of its own destruction, in that it diffuses technology and industry, thereby undermining its own position." Today, Lenin's heirs are actively stealing American technology, and the United States Government is trying to stop them.

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MACNEIL: When President Reagan banned high technology sales to the Soviet Union last week, he was doing more than punishing Moscow for Poland. It was a further move to stop what the Administration believes is a leakage dangerous to the national security. By legal means, espionage and theft, Communist countries have been steadily acquiring the latest electronic technology. The government is trying to tighten up security at electronic plants in California, where thefts of computer chips have reached what some call epidemic proportions.

Some of the microprocessor chips have been traced to East Bloc nations, which could use them to upgrade both civilian computers and military hardware.

More controversially, the Administration is trying to keep Communist scientists away from the latest technological advances by refusing them access to scientific meetings and restricting their activities at universities. Those efforts have raised a storm of protest from academics, who claim they not only violate academic freedom, but will slow down U.S. research.

Tonight, can an open society stop the Soviets from acquiring its technology, and how important is it to do so, anyway?